



January 15, 2010 - Congressman Boucher is joined by Edd Hill, Chairman of the Birthplace of Country Music Alliance, and Travis Jackson, of the Rural Development Agency, as Rick announces the largest single installment of funding to date for the Cultural Heritage Center.

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Announcement of Federal Funding for the Birthplace of Country Music Alliance Cultural

Heritage Center

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January 15, 2009

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It is my pleasure to return to Bristol this morning to announce a major allocation of federal funding which will significantly benefit both the efforts to enhance downtown Bristol and our region's tourism economy.

At my urging, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, through its Rural Development Agency is today providing a low-interest federal loan of \$2.5 million to the Birthplace of Country Music Alliance for the construction of its Cultural Heritage Center in downtown Bristol. This funding will enhance the effort to build a high quality facility showcasing our region's musical heritage in downtown Bristol.

When constructed, the Cultural Heritage Center has the potential to become a major tourist destination in itself. It is estimated that the Smithsonian quality museum and performing arts venue will bring tens of thousands of visitors to Bristol each year, supporting existing downtown businesses and creating new opportunities for local entrepreneurs.

The new Cultural Heritage Center will not only benefit Bristol's economy but will also benefit our region's tourism economy by adding a major asset to The Crooked Road, the region's tremendously successful effort to showcase its musical heritage with a driving trail extending from Rocky Mount to Clintwood.

The music which was born in the hills of our region is at the root of popular music that has spread across our nation and been exported to the world, and Bristol truly holds a momentous

place in our nation's music history. Recognizing its importance, the U.S. Congress formally declared Bristol the Birthplace of Country Music in 1998 when it approved a resolution I authored in a bi-partisan partnership with former Congressman Bill Jenkins for Tennessee's First District.

It was here that in July 1927, Ralph Peer came to record musicians from the southern Appalachian region for commercial distribution, an event often described as "the big bang of country music." Over the course of ten days, referred to as "the Bristol Sessions," Peer recorded the original Carter Family, Jimmie Rodgers, and many others who eventually found a commercial audience beyond this region for the first time.

The new Cultural Heritage Center will commemorate the musical heritage of our region and help us build on its musical legacy. The Center will offer state-of-the-art exhibits, educational programs and performances in the former Goodpasture Motors Building on Cumberland Street in downtown Bristol. The new Center will include gallery and exhibit space featuring state-of-the-art exhibits using the most advanced multi-media technologies. Additionally, a small 100 seat theatre will be constructed to complement downtown Bristol's existing performing venues. Two classrooms will be constructed to serve school children in the region.

A temporary exhibit gallery 2000 square feet in size will also be included. The Birthplace of Country Music Alliance is an affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution, and the temporary gallery will enable the Cultural Heritage Center to host temporary exhibits on loan from the Smithsonian.

The total cost for the construction of the new Cultural Heritage Center will be more than \$10 million. In addition to the \$2.5 million in federal funding I am announcing today, the Appalachian Regional Commission has provided a federal grant of \$50,000 toward the planning of the center. Additionally, another \$500,000 has been requested from the Appalachian Regional Commission for the project, and I am urging final federal approval of these funds. The Virginia Tobacco Commission, the City of Bristol, Virginia, the City of Bristol, Tennessee, and several private individuals, corporations and foundations have contributed more than \$3 million toward the project.

Today, a vigorous fundraising campaign begins to raise the final \$3.7 million necessary to begin construction. I will continue working with the Birthplace of Country Music Alliance and the

City of Bristol to assist in securing these funds. Once construction begins on the Cultural Heritage Center, it is estimated that the work will take approximately two years including both the building renovations and the exhibit installation.

With the federal funding I am announcing today, we are well on our way to constructing the new Birthplace of Country Music Alliance Cultural Heritage Center. This project represents the work of many individuals and organizations over several years, and I am pleased that we are taking this significant step in constructing the new Center. I would like to thank a number of individuals I have worked with over the years whose efforts have been critical in today's announcement.

I want to thank Edd Hill, current President of the Birthplace of Country Music Alliance, as well as past presidents Fred McClellan and Leton Harding for their dedicated efforts to build the Cultural Heritage Center.

The other members of the Birthplace of Country Music Alliance Board of Directors deserve our appreciation as well.

Bill Hartley, the Alliance's Executive Director, deserves our thanks today for his outstanding work in aid of the Alliance.

I also want to thank Travis Jackson with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Agency for his excellent assistance in securing these federal funds.

I want to thank Jim Rector, Mayor, and the Bristol, Virginia City Council for their continued support of this project and longstanding efforts for the betterment of Bristol. Fred Testa, Mayor of Bristol, Tennessee, and that City's Council deserve our thanks as well.

Finally, I would like to thank my project manager Derek Lyall for his persistent and persuasive efforts in aid of this project.

The Birthplace of Country Music Alliance's Cultural Heritage Center will become a great asset to our region. I am pleased that the Rural Development Agency has made this significant federal investment in the future of our region. The new Cultural Heritage Center will draw thousands of visitors to our region and boost our tourism economy.